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METHODS IN USE OF ACCREDITING SCHOOLS.¹

THE time allotted for consideration of this subject necessarily limits me to a brief presentation of its main essentials. It has been deemed best, therefore, to confine the scope of this paper to a concise exposition of the origin and progress of the accrediting system, the present methods of accrediting schools, the methods of certificating students, and the general evaluation of the system as conceived and executed primarily by the University of Michigan, supplementing it with reports of methods in use in other institutions whenever sufficient differentiation obtains to cause any material modifications of the plans evolved. I shall make no attempt to set the merits or the demerits of the accrediting system over against those of the examination system as operating within the territory covered by this association. To do so would be to transcend the bounds circumscribed by the topic assigned me.

The accrediting system had its origin at the University of Michigan in a resolution adopted by the faculty in 1871 and confirmed by the Board of Regents in 1872—thirty years ago. It sprang from two apparently antagonistic causes: first, from an earnest desire on the part of the president and members of the faculty to co-operate with superintendents and principals of high schools with a view to consolidating, strengthening, and elevating the entire system of the state; and, secondly, from urgent solicitations of superintendents and principals of the leading high schools of the state for closer articulation with the university as an organic part of the educational system, to the end that each institution might react upon and stimulate the other for the benefit of each and the good of the whole.

In the early beginnings of the accrediting system a committee of the faculty, upon special invitation of superintendents and boards of education, annually visited the high schools and exam-

¹ This address was delivered at the annual meeting of the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Middle States and Maryland at Baltimore, Md.

ined their courses of study, methods of instruction, scholarship of teachers and pupils, library and laboratory facilities, and prevailing intellectual and moral conditions. In addition, schedules of test questions, previously prepared for use of visiting committees, were assigned the various classes and their written answers submitted as confirmatory evidence of the character of the work accomplished. These findings were reported to the faculty, and upon their character was determined the future relationship between each individual high school and the university.

As time advanced, and the number of schools seeking accredited relationship multiplied, this system was found burdensome and impracticable. The professors were too engrossed with their legitimate university duties to give sufficient time properly to conduct this work. In consequence the formal test examination fell into disuse, and the term of affiliated relationship was gradually extended to two or three years, according to the excellence of the school, the university always reserving the right to re-examine whenever, in its judgment, changed conditions might seem to warrant.

This system prevailed until three years ago, when stress of numbers, inadaptability of certain members of the faculty to do the work of inspection, and a desire for greater uniformity of standards and methods necessitated a change. Following the example of several of her sister-institutions, the University of Michigan appointed a special official to take sole charge of inspection and to report his findings to a so-called diploma school committee, composed of heads of departments, with the president of the university as chairman. This plan of inspection now obtains, in some form or other, in connection with all the great universities of the Northwest, except the universities of Minnesota and Indiana. The smaller institutions generally accept the standards set by the great universities of their respective states.

The University of Minnesota, as stated, has no special high-school inspector as such, but it attains practically the same ends through the State High-School Board, an organization created by the legislature and endowed with certain specific powers and duties. This board appoints the state high-school inspector,

determines the methods of examination and standards of scholarship, and approves or disapproves of the work of each individual high school according to the findings reported. If these findings are satisfactory, the high school is given a bonus of \$400 from the state treasury as an aid and stimulus to further endeavor and is placed on the accredited list. Students graduating from such approved schools are, if properly recommended, admitted without examination into all the higher institutions of the state, including the state university. That the standards set for the high schools are of a high order is attested by the fact that the president of the state university is *ex officio* chairman of the State High-School Board.

In Indiana the methods of procedure are widely divergent from those already described. In that state the inspecting and accrediting function is performed solely by the State Board of Education, the different members of the board apportioning the work among themselves. Graduates from the high schools thus accredited, or "commissioned," are admitted without examination, when properly recommended, into the state university and all the other high institutions of the state.

As stated above, therefore, the field-work in connection with the great universities of the north central states, with the exceptions named, is conducted at the present time by special inspectors. And, although representing different institutions, so systematic has the work become that the inspectors follow the same general methods of procedure, apply the same general principles of analysis, and seek the same general ends. Their methods differ somewhat in minor details, but not in essentials. The routine is practically as follows :

The inspector visits the schools without previous notification. He learns the population of the city, the total enrolment of the schools, the enrolment in the high school, and the number of teachers employed, both in the grades and in the high school. He acquaints himself with the teachers of the high school, inquires concerning their academic and professional preparation, the subjects they teach, and the number and average length of their daily class periods. He visits the class-rooms, analyzes the

work of the teachers, and endeavors to determine the efficiency of each by noting his aim and plan of lesson, his mastery of the subject, his skill in adapting the lesson to the needs and capacities of his pupils, his ability to analyze and classify difficulties, his power to attract and hold attention, his skill in the art of questioning, his assignment of the lesson; he also notes the manner in which the pupils have attacked the lesson, their habits of thought and study, and the general spirit and progress of the class. He examined the course of study, the text-books used, the library and laboratory facilities; he takes note of the plan of organization, the character and methods of discipline, and the intellectual and moral tone of the school; and he ascertains the average size of the graduating classes, the number of graduates attending higher institutions of learning, the number now preparing for such institutions, and the general attitude of the board of education, the patrons, and the community toward the school and toward educational affairs generally. Finally, he examines the structure, capacity, heating, lighting, and ventilating of school buildings.

All these facts and more are recorded by the inspector and reported back to the proper committee, or to the faculty, as a basis for determining what relationship should exist between the high school and the university. In case, however, it is a high school seeking a renewal of accredited relationship, this report is supplemented by official records showing the ability, or inability of the students representing this high school to pursue university work with profit. If all the conditions essential to a school of high grade, as indicated by the inspector's report and by the scholarship of the students of this school attending the university, are present, the high school is formally approved and placed on the accredited list; if these conditions are wanting, the school is rejected, and the reasons therefor are specifically given to the proper authorities. It should be remarked in this connection, however, that some universities, notably Chicago and Illinois, follow the plan of accrediting by subjects, approving some and disapproving others; while the universities of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Iowa regard the high school as a unit and accept it or reject it as such.

As to methods of certificating students to university authorities, there is much confusion and misunderstanding, especially among those unacquainted with the workings of the accrediting system. It is generally assumed that the possession of a diploma from an approved high school opens wide the doors of the university to all who may choose to enter. Such is far from the exact truth. At least four conditions must be fulfilled before an applicant can receive recognition at the hands of the university :

1. The applicant must have received his preparatory training in an accredited high school.

2. The applicant must be a graduate of an accredited high school. The university sets the stamp of its disapproval upon non-high school graduates and will give them no recognition whatever. Only the finished high-school product receives consideration.

3. The applicant must present a regulation certificate, furnished by the university and properly filled and signed by the superintendent or principal of high school ; this certificate states that he has completed all the work required for entrance to the university and specifies the branches pursued, number of weeks and of recitations per week devoted to each, text-books used, and the teachers' estimates of his scholarship in the several branches.

4. The applicant must furnish a recommendation from the superintendent, high-school principal, or faculty attesting their belief in his ability to pursue university work with pleasure and profit to himself and credit to the university. The aim of this provision is manifestly to throw the responsibility for his success back upon the high school where it properly belongs. The school knows, on the one hand, all about the student, his powers, capabilities, and impulses ; and, on the other, all about the requirements of the university, and should, therefore, be able to judge accurately whether he is of university material.

It should be observed that after the first semi-annual examination of the freshman year, the records of scholarship attained by the students thus recommended are reported back to their respective high schools, and the credit or discredit, after making

due allowances for changed conditions, is charged accordingly. So deeply is the responsibility felt by high-school authorities that they are wont to exaggerate on the side of conservatism. This is not only the testimony of superintendents and principals themselves, but it is demonstrated by the fact that every year numbers of students who have been refused recommendations by the accredited schools present themselves and enter the university by way of the examination door. This requirement has led not a few high-school authorities to grade the diplomas granted to the graduating classes as "A" and "B," the former entitling the holder to certificates of admission to the university, and the latter withholding such privilege.

Having now briefly indicated the origin and early development of the accrediting system, the methods of accrediting schools, and the methods of certificating students to university authorities, there remains to ask what is the effect of this system upon the university, upon the high schools, and upon the educational system of the state as a whole. From the standpoint of the University of Michigan, two features are worthy of consideration: first, the effect of the system upon scholarship; and, secondly, its effect upon attendance.

As to scholarship, little better can be done than to summarize a report made by a committee of the faculty appointed to investigate the standings of students admitted on certificate as compared with those admitted on examination for the first nine years of the existence of the accrediting system. This committee made a careful study of the examination records of all the members of the freshmen classes for the period named, and tabulated the results in such manner as to show separately the standings of those admitted on certificate and those admitted on examination—a study involving more than a thousand students and more than ten thousand examinations. The committee refrained from examining the records subsequent to the freshman year, in the belief that one year in the university ought to obliterate the main distinctions arising from differences in preparatory schools. From the tables thus framed and classified the committee computed the percentages of scholarships from each class by dividing the

number of examinations successfully passed by the number that, by order of the faculty, ought to have been passed. The following are the results obtained :

Total number of students admitted on certificate	-	-	-	470
The percentage of scholarship	-	-	-	88.91
The total number of students admitted on examination	-	-	574	
The percentage of scholarship	-	-	-	87.22

It will be observed that the committee found a slight balance in favor of admission by certificate, showing that the university was the gainer, rather than the loser, by the change. Unfortunately no systematic investigations have been made since that time. It is our firm belief, however, that a like investigation today would not result to the disadvantage of the certificated student.

As to the effect of the certificate system on the attendance at the university, there is not the slightest doubt in the minds of any conversant with its workings but that it greatly increases it. This is the unanimous verdict of high-school and university authorities, of the students themselves, and of high-school inspectors. It follows as a natural consequence from shortening and smoothing the pathway leading from the high school to the university and from bringing them into closer union and sympathy with each other. Two illustrations from many: A little more than a year ago the inspector responded to an invitation to examine the high school in the town of A. He was informed by the superintendent that there was no one preparing to enter higher institutions and no sentiment for such preparation, but that he desired affiliated relationship with the university for the purpose of creating and arousing such an interest. The school was examined and accredited in the usual way. This very act seemed to arouse such ambitions, and to open the door to such undreamed possibilities, that three students entered the university in the fall and others went elsewhere.

Somewhat less than a year ago the high school in the town of B. was re-examined and rejected after having been on our accredited list for many years. Six students who were preparing to enter the university on certificate were thus deprived

of the privilege and could now enter only on examinations. Of these six, one came and was successful; the other five sought institutions of lower grade. The school has now been reorganized and has made application for re-examination.

But it is from the standpoint of the high schools that the crowning virtue of the accrediting system is most marked, a fact wholly unrecognized and unappreciated by the great majority of those unacquainted with the practical workings of the system. It has been deemed best, therefore, to point out definitely and specifically wherein the accrediting system reflects upon and exalts the high schools, even at the cost of overlapping and repetition.

1. *Its influence upon standards.*—Before a school can be accredited it must offer all the branches required at the university for admission; it must pursue them for certain periods of time, the minimum of which is specified; it must give suitable opportunities for library and laboratory work; and it must attain a certain fixed degree of thoroughness, vitality, and spirit of scholarship. The inspector comes, backed by all the authority and influence of a great university, examines these standards according to his definitely fixed ideals, and reports back to the proper authorities. Upon this report hang in a large measure the reputation, the influence, and the prestige of the school, and therefore a favorable outcome is highly prized. Inspectors are frequently requested by superintendents to examine their schools unofficially for the sole purpose of aiding them in marking and bettering their standards.

2. *Its influence upon the teaching force.*—After the inspector has examined a high school, as heretofore outlined, comes the conference. Here he explains to the superintendent or principal the conditions as he sees them, commending the good and pointing out the bad. He explains the theories of the university, changes in requirements for admission, and plans in operation in the best high schools, and he suggests ways and means for correcting deficiencies and laying solid foundations for scholarship. He advises also concerning the organization, the methods of discipline, the courses of study, library and laboratory facili-

ties, text-books, and supplies. The inspector listens, in turn, to a statement of their difficulties, fears, hopes, and ambitions, and aids to the best of his ability in their proper solution. He meets the teachers, if need be, and gives them opportunity to ask for his criticisms, suggestions, and help—an opportunity of which they freely avail themselves. If the standards of the school are only moderately satisfactory, or are too low to warrant establishment of accredited relationship, it is placed on the “nursing list” and re-examined the following year. If conducted frankly and sympathetically, the conference hour can be made productive of immeasurable benefit.

3. *Its influence upon pupils.*—The influence of the accrediting system upon pupils has already been indicated. There needs to be added, however, that the opening of the university door to all properly accredited students is not the only potent influence at work among them. The repeated visits of the university inspector are of scarcely less importance. They arouse among the pupils of the average high school a spirit of inquiry concerning colleges and universities; they set them to thinking and to talking about going to college; they intensify their desires and stimulate their ambitions to make the trial. The very fact that a great educational institution will send an official to them adds dignity, importance, and seriousness of purpose to the work of the school and to the work of life. The pupils often ask questions concerning the university, the expenses of living, the opportunities for self-help, the methods of securing rooms and of registering. These the inspector answers individually, in groups, or in a short address before the school, offering suggestions, encouragement, help.

4. *Its influence upon the board of education and the communities.*—The boards of education and the communities always desire the highest possible efficiency of their schools, and they have come to measure this efficiency by the recognition the schools receive at the hands of the university. They therefore cordially invite the university inspector, earnestly seek his opinions and advice, and give serious consideration to all his recommendations. Indeed, so thoroughly have they come to rely upon the university

to mark the efficiency of their schools that I do not exaggerate when I say that there are few places in Michigan where a superintendent or high-school principal can long maintain his position if accredited relationship, once established with the university, should be repudiated on re-examination.

As to the effects of the accrediting system upon the educational system of the state as a whole, I quote from the annual report of President Angell to the Board of Regents, after an experiment of ten years ; He says :

This innovation on old customs, like all innovations, and chiefly because it was an innovation, was met at once with severe criticism and especially by some distinguished educators in the older colleges ; fearing, as was alleged, that such a system would bring down the standards of colleges. Experience, however, has proved that there was no ground for fear, except that the thing was new, and not practiced in the mother-colleges. Two facts are to be noted among the results : (1) The standard of preparation in the high schools, if affected at all, has been elevated rather than lowered ; (2) the state system of education has become a reality. It is obvious that there can be no system, properly so called, without an actual and living connection and communication among its members. By calling for the visiting or examining committee of the faculty, the high schools have been brought into that vital connection with the university which makes them parts of a natural organism and, so far as concerns our schools, our state system no longer exists merely on paper.

No one can look into the condition of these schools without feeling satisfied that this connection has had the effect both to animate their students to more earnest effort, and to encourage and strengthen the teachers ; while it has brought about a more perfect unity of plan and method in the schools of the state in general. In short, it gives to our schools, otherwise isolated, a bond of union and a center of life. We are convinced, as the result of an experiment of ten years, that this co-operative plan, especially if entered into by the few remaining schools, and thus perfected, will give a character of consistency, solidity, strength, and efficiency to the educational work of the state, which will leave nothing further to be desired but the uninterrupted operation and movement of the system.

At that time there were sixteen schools upon the accredited list ; today the number has swelled to 250. In a recent interview President Angell, in the light of the twenty years that have passed since that report was written, emphatically confirms the position there taken. He realizes that the accrediting system

has its limitations, the same as the examination or any other system ; but that, taken as a whole, it is freest from objections, is the most productive, and the most logical of all systems yet devised.

One criticism presents itself. The admission of properly accredited students to the university without examination tends to belittle examinations as an educational factor. This, however, is incidental rather than essential, and the university is gradually awakening to the necessity of setting the stamp of its disapproval upon it.

In conclusion permit me to say that the colleges and universities of the territory covered by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools are perfecting a plan looking toward a general recognition of the best high schools in the several states. When this plan is completed and put in execution, it will not be unlike this association in the breadth and uniformity of the work attempted.

A. S. WHITNEY.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN.